

## Holidays

**HEATHER EVANS AND HER VETERAN HORSE BILBO (ROYAL MIKADO) WOULD LIKE TO THANK, WHOLEHEARTEDLY, PENNINE BRIDLEWAY TRAILS FOR DONATING THE FIRST PRIZE FOR THE ENDURANCE GB RAFFLE LAST YEAR, ANNOUNCED AT THE AGM IN NOVEMBER.**

**IT WAS A GREAT SURPRISE! SHE HAPPENED TO BE STANDING NEAR SUE ROGERS & GILLY PAYTON WHEN SHE REALISED HER GOOD FORTUNE. THESE TWO HAD BEEN PLANNING A TRIP TO RIDE THE 'MARY TOWNLEY LOOP' DURING 2006, SO IT QUICKLY ESCALATED INTO A JOINT OUTING, INCLUDING THE SOUTHERN STRETCH IN DERBYSHIRE, WHICH WAS HEATHER'S PRIZE (B&B FOR HORSE & RIDER FOR 3 NIGHTS AT VENUES ALONG THIS ROUTE).**

**THE GROUP OF FOUR RIDERS (GILLY & SALLY PAYTON, SUE ROGERS & HEATHER, WITH DES PAYTON AS BACKUP & EXPERT CREW) WERE BLESSED WITH FANTASTIC WEATHER MOST OF THE WEEKS, & WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY RECOMMEND THE EXPERIENCE WHOLEHEARTEDLY!**



# BILBO STRIDES OUT AT 30

## HEATHER AND BILBO

I was gobsmacked when it was pointed out to me that Mark Holland had won the top prize at the EGB AGM last November. The prize was 3 nights B and B for horse and rider along the southern stretch of the Pennine Bridleway in Derbyshire. In fact, when he checked the stubs, Mark discovered that it was in fact MY ticket that had won, that he had address stamped, paid for and sent in.....

I was chatting with Sue Rogers about this win, and it transpired that she and Gilly Payton had already discussed riding the 'Mary Towneley Loop' this year, so it evolved quickly into a joint expedition!

Sue did most of the pre-ride organisation. It sounds simple 'go ride' stuff, but it's not! Not only did we have BandB organised for 6 nights for 5 people, 4 horses and one dog, but packed lunches for each leg of the trip. As a logistical example - the first lunch pack for the 'Loop' was prepared by the host we were staying with on the LAST night.....!

I was really looking forward to this experience with my novice horse - Swallow. However, she's a bright lass, and started giving me doubts about her availability a couple of weeks before we were due to travel to Derbyshire. Then she said she was fine, and I marked up maps and became really excited on the Saturday, two days before we were due to travel north. Sunday morning dawned to find a 3-legged horse, gloom and deep despair.

As I stomped about swearing unsympathetically at Swallow, I remembered her best pal and mentor Bilbo, 30y/o retired Endurance horse - aka Royal Mikado - notable for having won The Lindum (2-day 100 mile ER) aged 24. Grazing contentedly near his beloved Swallow, he had no idea that his retirement was about to be interrupted, for the 2nd time in his life.....

Bilbo 'came into work' in his 20th year, having spent almost a whole lifetime 'retired'. He was born while I was at University, in an apple orchard near Reading. He did the odd bit of hacking and jumping, here and there, but mostly stood in a field near wherever I happened to be living, with his mother, Suki. I discovered and started Endurance on his younger brother Woodstock, in 1995, but dragged Bilbo out of his field in 1996, after Woodstock went lame mid-

season. He took up Endurance with enthusiasm, and excelled!

He officially retired two years ago, as Swallow came of an age to take over. He lives out, and occasionally goes out for a potter, but nothing 'serious' these days. He has no bottom molars left, but keeps well and contented on a 'Simple Systems' diet of soaked chopped high quality forage feeds and 'Total Eclipse' supplement, with Cortaflex thrown in.

He was a bit hairy and muddy, but as desperation turned to possibility, I found a bucket of water and shampoo, and much to his surprise, bathed him head to toe! It was a warm, sunny day, so every inch was shampooed and scrubbed! He remained a bit hairy, dare I say scruffy, none the less.

When Monday morning arrived I was ready and packed, and Bilbo strode into the trailer enthusiastically for yet another adventure. Swallow looked miffed and lame, but the vet had been contacted first thing. About four hours later we arrived at Arbor Low - 'The Stonehenge of the North' - for our first farm BandB stopover. His companions arrived a little later, and they all enjoyed a couple of hours in a lush grass field.

The next morning we travelled the very short journey from Arbor Low by trailer, to start our ride from the southern most end of the Pennine Bridleway at Hartington Station. I still had no idea whether Bilbo would be able to cope with a couple of miles riding, or perhaps the whole first day, if we were lucky.

After the first mile or so walking, we all trotted forward, Bilbo found grass under his bare feet to the side of the track, and off he went. From then on 'Bilbo trot' was a canter. He LOVED it.

70 miles later, slightly weary after four days of seriously testing trekking over wonderful countryside (with a days rest mid-week), there was a real sense of achievement. We all walked down from Watergrove Reservoir, through Wardle, in close formation, to our last BandB at the end of the Mary Towneley Loop. The end of an extraordinary journey with Bilbo, and the best holiday I can remember!

THANK YOU Sue, Des, Gilly, Sally, Golar, Pilgrim, Polo and Ben for a great week of friendship and exploration.